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Gurney's Remarks on the Doctrinal Views of  
Friends - 1834

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## REMARKS

ON THE

DOCTRINAL VIEWS OF THE SOCIETY OF FRIENDS,

PREFIXED TO THE SEVENTH EDITION

OF

## OBSERVATIONS

ON THE

DISTINGUISHING VIEWS AND PRACTICES

OF THE

Society of Friends.

BY

JOSEPH JOHN GURNEY.

1834.

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*February 3, 1992*

## EXTRACT, &c.

In confining my attention, in the present work, chiefly to those points in religion, by which Friends are *distinguished* from other bodies of true Christian believers, nothing can be farther from me than any desire to throw into the shade those fundamental doctrines, in which all such believers agree. To unfold these doctrines, and to prove their truth from Scripture, is, in some other works, the sole object which I have pursued; and to maintain them fully and freely (as ability is afforded) in the presence of all men, I deem to be both my first duty, and my dearest right. When we reflect on the unutterable importance of eternity, on the value of never-dying souls, on the pains of hell, and on the joys of heaven, we cannot deny that to dwell on essential, saving, truth, is the main business of every religious teacher.

Dearly ought we to prize the many noble testimonies which have been borne by the Society of Friends, not only in the present day, but from its earliest rise, to the truth and importance of the doctrines of the New Testament. *Christ* has been the centre around which they have delighted to gather; and those who have quitted that centre have never failed to lose, in a spiritual sense at least, their unity with the body.

Since the Holy Scriptures contain a *divinely* authorised standard of revealed truth, and *are fully sufficient for their purpose*, Friends have always refused to bind themselves by any other written creed. Nevertheless, in every period of the Society's history, the acknowledged faith of the body has been sound and unquestionable. Repeatedly have they confessed their belief in one ever-living God, all-wise, almighty, omnipresent, the Creator and Ruler of the universe, holy, just, true, and merciful; in the immortality of the soul; in the resurrection of the dead; in the eternity

of future rewards and punishments; in the mysterious union and distinction of the Father, the Word, and the Holy Spirit; in the deity of our Lord Jesus Christ; in his incarnation and birth of the Virgin Mary; in his sinless human nature; in his meritorious obedience, sufferings, and death; in his resurrection and ascension; in his supreme and universal reign; in his spiritual presence with his people; and in his glorious future coming to judge the quick and the dead.

They are well aware of the fatal effects of the transgression of our first parents—that man is a fallen creature, by nature the child of wrath, prone to iniquity, and absolutely incapable of true holiness and happiness, unless he be born again of the Spirit; and they have been among the foremost to proclaim the power and devices of Satan, our tempter and accuser, who rules, in every age of the world, over the children of disobedience.

They know that “all have sinned and come short of the glory of God,” and have often declared in the most explicit manner, that it is only through the precious blood of Jesus Christ, shed for us on the cross, that our “iniquity is forgiven,” and our “sin covered.” This awful sacrifice they have always regarded as ordained in the eternal counsels of the Father, and as the highest proof both of his holiness and his love; and boldly have they asserted that it was made for *all men*; Christ was the “propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only, but for the sins of the whole world.”

I conceive that the views of our Society on this subject are remarkably comprehensive, and not more comprehensive than just. Not only have Friends at all times ascribed the forgiveness of sin to the free mercy of God in Christ Jesus; but they have set forth the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross as the very centre of all the virtue and all the hopes of our species. They have always believed that according to the gracious purposes of God our Father, this sacrifice (ordained before the foundation of the world, and accomplished in due season) was the means of procuring for fallen man the gift of the Holy Spirit; and that CHRIST HIMSELF

manifested by his Spirit, in the heart, is that “true light which lighteth every man that cometh into the world.”

Our frequent declaration of the Christian principle, that without holiness none can see the Lord, or enter into his kingdom, has led some persons to imagine that our Society under-rates the importance and necessity of *faith*. Yet there is probably no truth on which Friends have been more accustomed to insist, than the Scripture doctrine, that the “just shall live by faith.” They freely acknowledge that *faith* is the appointed instrument of man’s salvation; and that as is the light bestowed upon us, so is the *belief* required of us. They rejoice in the assurance of Scripture, that “God was in Christ, *reconciling* the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them;”\* that we are justified freely by his grace, through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus,† and that whosoever *believeth* in the Son of God, shall “not perish,” but shall “have everlasting life.”‡

But Friends have not failed to declare their sentiment, that the faith by *which we are saved*, is not the result of learning, or the mere conviction of the human understanding, but a divine gift,—an effect of the Spirit,—infallibly productive of a life of righteousness,—as a tree produces its natural fruit. Neither do they allow that even a saving faith is any thing more than the *instrument* of our justification—the *hand* by which the penitent sinner, made sensible of the terrors of the law, and *turned away from his iniquities*, is enabled to put on the robe of the righteousness of Christ. They ever held that, under the pardoning love of the Father, the procuring cause of our acceptance with God, and of our final salvation, is CHRIST ALONE, received into the heart of the believer, as the sole object of his confidence, and ruling there by his Spirit.||

We plainly learn from Scripture that the Mosaic priesthood, with all its ceremonial rites, was in point of authority abolished by the death of Christ; and that, under the dis-

\* 2 Cor. v. 19. † Rom. iii. 24. ‡ John iii. 16, 36.

|| Rom. iv. 25; Gal. iv. 19.

pensation of the gospel, the glorified Jesus *alone* is invested with the sacerdotal office. Not only has he offered once for all a sacrifice for the sins of mankind, but now he “appears in the presence of God for us,” pleads our cause, rebukes our enemy, and intercedes with the Father on our behalf. He is the “minister of the sanctuary, and of the true tabernacle which the Lord pitched, and not man;”\* and “in that he himself hath suffered being tempted, he is able to succour them that are tempted.”† Now I conceive that among the various classes of true Christians, there are none who have more faithfully maintained these truths than the Society of Friends. It has always been with them a point of leading importance, that Christ is the *only* High Priest of our profession ; the sole Mediator between God and man, on whom the Christian believer may place his reliance. How often has it been proclaimed within our borders, that Christ “is able to save them to the uttermost who come unto God by him ; seeing he ever-liveth to make intercession for them;” and that “such an high priest became us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and made higher than the heavens.”‡

It was part of the office of the high Priest of the Israelites, to conduct the worship of the people, to preside over their religious assemblies, and to bless them in the name of the Lord. Friends have always been strongly attached to the corresponding features in the priesthood of our Redeemer. They delight in the assurance that he still descends to preside over the solemn meetings of Christian believers, to hallow their worship, and to spread over them the peaceful canopy of his presence. Long have they been accustomed to realize that ancient prophecy—“In that day shall the Lord of Hosts be for a crown of glory, and for a diadem of beauty to the residue of his people; and for a spirit of judgment to him that sitteth in judgment, and for strength to them that turn the battle to the gate.”||

What a noble view did our forefathers take of the doctrine

\* Heb. viii. 2.

† Heb. ii. 18.

‡ Heb. vii. 26. 26.

|| Isaiah xxviii. 5, 6.

of the Holy Spirit ! They were bold to assert that as, on the one hand, Christ died for all men, so on the other, all are made partakers of a measure of the light, life, power, and spirit of the Redeemer of men—that there is not a man born into the world who has not his day of visitation—that a law is written with the finger of God, on the hearts of all men, by which, in *various degrees*, the natural conscience is enlightened and guided.

They knew indeed that this light is often very faint in the children of ignorance and idolatry ; that it shines “in a dark place,” and that the darkness comprehends it not ; but they also knew that it is pure and unchanging in its character. Never did they dare to consider it as a part of fallen man’s corrupt nature ; never did they hesitate to ascribe it to the free and universal grace of God, through Christ Jesus our Lord.

The view which our early Friends took of this great doctrine, appears never to have suggested to them a single doubt of the importance of spreading a knowledge of the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. On the contrary, many of them were diligently engaged in this work, and laboured for the diffusion of true Christianity, not only in their own land, but when they ran to and fro in the earth, and in the distant isles of the sea. George Fox in particular was a zealous promoter of the knowledge of Christ, and laboured for its dissemination among the negroes of the West-Indies. The same faithful elder fervently exhorted his friends in North America to teach the native Indians in that country, that Christ had tasted death for every man ; and he freely told them, that the gospel of life and salvation must be preached to every creature under heaven.\*

It is, indeed, only the abuse of the doctrine of a universal light, which could lead any man to set at nought any Christian effort for so holy a purpose. The doctrine itself affords a delightful encouragement to all such labours of love. Who that is engaged in preaching the gospel, either at home or abroad, can deny the advantage of being able to appeal to

the light of God's law appearing in the hearts of his hearers ? By such an appeal, he may, through the influence of the Holy Spirit, convince them of sin, and may thus prepare the way of Christ; and although this light may not always shine brightly, yet *according to its measure*, it will still be a sure ally to the word preached ; it will be found *invariably* on the side of truth, and holiness, and God.

That there is a vast difference, in point of morals and religion, between the condition of the heathen world and that of Christian nations, no well-informed person will pretend to deny ; and the more we are aware of our superior advantages in these respects, the more zealous we ought to be in diffusing the benefits which we ourselves enjoy, among our benighted fellow-men. But of what permanent use to *us* will be the knowledge of the gospel, if we do not give way to the influence of that divine Spirit, who *strives*, in much long-suffering, with unregenerate man ?\*

There is a work of God upon the soul, which precedes conversion, as well as one which follows it ; and the former, though sometimes rapid, or even sudden, is, for the most part, like the latter, extremely gradual. This *preparatory* work of the Spirit, especially in the minds of young people, when he visits them at unexpected moments, reproves them for sin, brings them into tenderness, and allures them into the love and fear of God, is one branch of the great plan of redemption, on which Friends have at all times loved to dwell. They have never failed to insist on the necessity of obedience to the still small voice of the inward Teacher ; and they have always maintained that this obedience is of primary importance to a right knowledge of the truth. The more use we make of the light bestowed upon us, the more will that light be increased ; it will set our sins in order before us ; it will humble us in a clear view of our own unworthiness ; it will lead us to the foot of the Saviour's cross. It is the influence of the Spirit of the Father, operating on the willing soul, which can alone bring us to a real and practical acquaintance with the Son of his love.

\* See Gen. vi. 3.

Yet nothing could be farther from the minds of our early Friends, than so to misapply this truth, as in any degree to justify the disuse of the Holy Scriptures. They were themselves diligent readers of the Bible; and they well knew that it was in the use and not in the neglect of this blessed means appointed by Providence for our instruction, that we are to expect the more abundant light and influence of the Holy Spirit.

There is probably no body of Christians who have taken more pains than Friends have done, to enjoin upon their members a frequent perusal of the Scriptures of Truth. It is one of those duties which is annually brought home to us by a public inquiry addressed to all our inferior meetings; and it has been the subject of many a warm exhortation, and many a strong advice, issued by our yearly meeting itself. Nothing can have been more clear than the testimony of the Society to the divine origin of the book. Friends have always asserted that it was given by inspiration of God; and when our forefathers were defamed by their adversaries, and falsely accused of unsound principles, they always appealed to Scripture as the **ONLY** authoritative test by which their sentiments could be tried. They boldly invited their hearers and readers to imitate the example of the noble Beræans—to search the Scriptures daily, that they might know “whether these things were so.”

On this important subject I apprehend that the views of Friends are in accordance with those of other sound and reflecting Christians, although there may prevail between them and ourselves some difference in *phraseology*. If we object to call the Scriptures the Word, or the Word of God, it is not because we entertain the smallest doubt that they are given by inspiration of God; it is only because the Scriptures themselves teach us that this name, *considered as a title of pre-eminence*, properly belongs to our Lord Jesus Christ. If we assert the essential superiority of the Holy Spirit, it is not that we regard the sacred writings as a fallible standard, or do not truly reverence them; but only that we are anxious to distinguish between that which is produced,

and the power that produces it; between the work which we can see, and handle, and *its divine, unchangeable Author.*

That the Holy Scriptures, like other ancient writings, have in some degree suffered by passing through the hands of men, is evident from the numerous various readings, both in the Hebrew Bible, and in the Greek Testament. But although the sacred volume thus partakes of the imperfection which attaches to all material objects, Friends have ever been ready, in unison with their fellow-christians, to adore that especial providence which has so signally preserved it from *essential* harm. They joyfully confess that the lapse of time, and the carelessness of transcribers, have not been permitted to deprive the Scriptures of a single doctrinal truth, or a single moral principle; that the wisdom, richness, and harmony of their contents, afford abundant proof that they came from God; and that, as the original record of all religious truth, they stand, and ever must stand, unrivalled and alone.

Many of the early members of the society were persons of considerable learning, and they never scrupled to make use of their literature, for the elucidation of religious subjects—a remark which applies with peculiar force to Barclay the apologist. Certainly there is nothing in our genuine principles which need discourage any one from a critical study of the Bible in a humble and teachable spirit. It is surely both a duty and a privilege, as opportunity is afforded, to make use of those various sources of information, from which so much light has been thrown, not merely on its historical and descriptive parts, but even on its doctrines and precepts. Yet Friends have always regarded it as an especial duty to insist on the great principle, that “the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God;” and that we cannot possibly obtain a saving knowledge of the truths revealed in the Bible, except by the gracious aid of its omnipotent Author.

They are not ashamed to exhort one another, earnestly to seek for that divine influence, in the perusal of Scripture, which can alone present its precious contents in their true light to the understanding, and impress them with power on

the heart. It has been well said by a learned and pious man, that to the spiritually minded reader, and to him alone, the Bible is a book full of illuminated characters. But even when the book is not before us, how often does the good Remembrancer remind us of passages suited to the various turns of our experience, and arrayed for the occasion in new brightness and beauty!

Having offered these remarks, on the views of Friends respecting the sacred volume, I must revert, for a short time, to the doctrine of the Spirit. I conceive there is nothing to which the Scriptures bear a stronger testimony than to the divine character, and free and unfettered influences, of the Holy Ghost. As it is by the Spirit alone that we are brought to Christ, and become, through faith in the Saviour, the reconciled children of God; so the Spirit alone can lead us onwards in the way of holiness, cleanse the inward recesses of our hearts, and prepare us for an entrance into perfect purity. Thus it is, as Friends have always believed, that "the path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the *perfect* day" \*—thus only, that we can obey the awful precept—"Be ye therefore *perfect*, even as your Father, which is in heaven, is *perfect*." †

The pre-eminent grace, and peculiar office, of the Holy Spirit *in believers*, as well as his general and preparatory influences, are indeed subjects which have always been prominent in the religious views of Friends. From their first rise as a society, they were led to testify of the utter vanity of the most orthodox creed, without the *possession* of the *life* which is in Christ; and while they spake with deep reverence of the atoning blood of the Lamb, they assured their hearers that it would be impossible for them to partake of its benefit, unless their hearts were given up to the cleansing work, and inward government of the Spirit of their Redeemer. They boldly declared that justification by faith in Christ crucified, and sanctification by his Spirit, went hand in hand, and could never be separated. Christ "gave himself for us

\* Prov. iv. 18.    † Matt. 5. 48.

that he might redeem us *from all iniquity*, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works.”\* He “bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness.”†

The comprehensive nature of the promises of God respecting the Holy Spirit, is a point to which the attention of our religious society has always been directed with peculiar force. They believe them to be addressed to the *whole* Church of Christ *in all ages*, for they read that the Comforter was to continue with the disciples of Jesus “for ever”‡—that His influence was to be bestowed not merely on the earliest converts to Christianity, but on their children also, and on all that are afar off, even “as many” as the Lord our God should “call.”||

And what are these promises? Large and various indeed! That the Spirit should be poured forth from on high, and convert the wilderness into a fruitful field; so that the work of righteousness should be peace, and the effect thereof quietness and assurance for ever;§ that God should write his law on the hearts of his people, and that *all* should know him, from the least to the greatest;¶ that He should sprinkle clean water upon them, give them new hearts and new spirits, and cleanse them from *all* their filthiness and *all* their idolatry;\* that He should pour forth his Spirit upon *all* flesh, and that the sons and the daughters, the servants and the handmaidens, should prophesy;† that *all* the children of Zion should be taught of the Lord, and that great should be their peace;‡ that Jesus exalted very high, “should sprinkle many nations;”|| that he should lead captivity captive, and receive gifts for men, even for the rebellious;§ that he should sit as a refiner and purifier of silver, and purify the sons of Levi;¶ that he should baptize his followers with the Holy Ghost and with fire, and thoroughly cleanse them from sin;\* that he should send the Comforter unto them from the Fa-

\* Tit. 2. 14.      † 1 Pet. ii. 24.      ‡ John xiv, xv, & xvi.

|| Acts ii, 39.      § Isa. xxxii, 15—17.      ¶ Jer. xxxi. 33.      \* Esek. xxxvi, 25.

† Joel ii, 28, 29.      † Isaiah liv, 13.      || Isaiah lii, 15.      § Ps. lxviii, 18.

¶ Mal. iii, 3.      \* Matt. iii, 11

ther, and that the Father should send the same Comforter in the name of Christ;\* that the Holy Spirit should convince the world of sin, of righteousness and of judgment;† that he should testify of Christ;‡ that he should receive of the things of Christ, and show them unto his disciples;|| that he should teach them all things, and bring all things to their remembrance whatsoever Christ has said to them;§ that he should be in them, and dwell in them;¶ that he should show them things to come;\* finally, that he should **GUIDE THEM INTO ALL TRUTH.**\*

Paul bears testimony to the fulfilment of these predictions when he declares, in reference to the gospel dispensation, that the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus had made him free from the law of sin and death;† that as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God;‡ that Christians are “the temple of the Holy Ghost” which is *in* them, which they “have of God;”|| and that they are “baptized by one Spirit into one body;”§—Peter, when he writes of the baptism which now saves us,¶ and of the Spirit of glory and of God resting on believers;\* James, when he tells us of the pure and peaceable wisdom which cometh from above;†—and John, when he proclaims the sovereign efficacy of the Lord’s anointing, “Ye have an unction from the Holy One, and ye know all things.....the anointing which ye have received of him (i. e. of Christ) abideth in you, and *and ye need not that any man teach you*; but as the same anointing teacheth you of all things, and is truth and no lie, and even as it hath taught you, ye shall abide in Him.”†

There is probably no body of Christians by whom these precious truths have been more clearly advanced, than by the Society of Friends. It has always appeared to them, that the free and immediate teaching of the Spirit of Christ is the main characteristic of that new covenant which was established in the world by his propitiatory death. It seems, indeed, to

\* John xiv, 26; xv, 26.    † John xvi, 8.    ‡ John xv, 26.

|| John xvi, 14.    § John xiv, 26.    ¶ John xiv, 17.

\* John xvi, 13.    † Rom. viii, 2.    ‡ Rom. viii, 14.

|| 1. Cor. vi, 19.    § 1. Cor. xii, 13.    ¶ 1. Pet. iii, 21.

\* 1. Pet. iv, 14.    † Jas. iii, 17.    ‡ 1. John ii, 20—27.

have been the chief business intrusted to them, in the church of Christ, to wean men from an undue reliance on an outward ministry, and from all merely human systems in religion, and to lead them to the feet of Jesus. Rightly have they deemed it to be the highest privilege of the Christian believer to draw near to the Father of mercies, through his beloved Son, to wait on God in the silence of all flesh, and to be guided and governed, **IN ALL THINGS**, by his Holy Spirit.

It is under this guidance, as Friends have always believed, that the disciples of Jesus are enabled to apply to *particular* occasions, the *general* rules of God's law; and that even in temporal matters which, more or less, involve their spiritual interests, they may be led along in a path of safety. Christ, their divine teacher cannot be removed into a corner—his light shines in their consciences. If they patiently wait upon him, and pray for his Spirit, he will, from time to time, arise for their help; he will guide them with his "counsel," and make *his "way"* straight before their face.

But if this be true respecting our common course of life and duty, who shall deny that it is also true in relation to the particular services into which we may be called for the benefit of the church? It is on scriptural authority, that Friends have always asserted, that no voice can lawfully call into these services, but the voice of the Holy Spirit; and that nothing can truly qualify for the performance of them, but the *Lord's anointing*.

I wish to take the present opportunity of expressing my continued conviction of the immense importance of this Christian principle, which appears to me to have been far too much neglected in the professing church of Christ. I am, indeed, well aware that we have no reason in the present day to expect either *miracles*, or those extraordinary measures of inspiration, which were bestowed on the apostles; for these probably have already served their purpose in the establishment of Christianity in the world. But we are surely authorised in expecting the *enlivening* visitations of an omnipresent Saviour, the perceptible guidance of his Spirit in the

path of duty, and the pouring forth of that divine influence, which can alone prepare us for the Lord's service, and rightly suggest and direct the ministry of the gospel.

Through the efficacy of this principle our Society first arose; and if we would continue as a people, to live and grow in the truth, we must adhere to it with unalterable firmness. "The anointing" will yet do wonders for us, if we are but faithful to its monitions, and submissive to the various crosses and mortifications into which it leads.

Nor are we left without an adequate motive to such a course of faithfulness and obedience. The *love of Christ* constraineth us; we are bound by every tie of duty, honour and gratitude, to devote ourselves to the service of that adorable Redeemer, whose we are, because he has bought us with *his own blood*.

Here I must be allowed to express my belief that a humble reliance on the teaching of the Spirit, and a diligent use of the sacred Scriptures, were the means of leading our fore-fathers into all those distinguishing views and practices which are described in the present volume. If this be true—and we have surely abundant reason for believing it to be so—what ought to be our course?

Shall we turn our backs on our high Christian views of the spirituality of true worship? Shall we return to ceremonial and figurative rites? Shall we make way in our meetings for a ministry, which one man may prepare, and another appoint? Shall we cease from our testimony against all pecuniary corruption in the church? Shall we forget the sweetness and solemnity of true silence? Shall we surrender our Saviour's standard of the *yea* and the *nay*, and no longer refuse an oath when expediency is supposed to demand it? Shall we, after all our peaceable professions, recur to the warfare of the world? Shall we forsake our simplicity in dress and language, and break down a hedge which so usefully protects many of our beloved young people from the vanities of the world? In short, shall we renounce that *unbending* adherence to the rule of right, by which our

forefathers were distinguished? Shall we exchange a child-like obedience to the Shepherd's voice, for the mind which is ever ready to criticise and to argue?

If such, through the wiles of Satan, should be our course, how awful and affecting must be the consequence. The gracious purposes for which we were raised up to be a people, will be frustrated through our want of faithfulness; and by forsaking our own place and sphere of duty in the fold of Christ, it is but too probable that we may, in the end, fall from Christ himself, and become wanderers in the barren wastes of an empty profession. But if, on the contrary, we are bold in the Lord to answer these questions in the negative—if we resign ourselves, through every loss and cross, to the disposal of our Holy Head, and diligently endeavour to “keep” *all* his “testimonies;” if we resolve to follow the Lord’s Spirit in *all things*—we may reverently believe that he will preserve us unhurt. The humble hope may then arise, that his own eternal power will again be known to abound amongst us; and that many living witnesses to the truth will yet be raised up, within our borders, to the praise of his glorious name.

In conclusion, I would express an earnest desire that we may be enabled more and more to commend our religious Society, in secret and fervent prayer to God. Let us pray that we may be taught of him, to open our hearts and understandings to the *whole* truth as it is in Jesus—that we may stand with immoveable stedfastness on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone—and that on this foundation we may be built up a spiritual temple, which shall ever bear the inscription of **HOLINESS UNTO THE LORD.**



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